PORTRAIT OF A FRIENDSHIP: LISZT AND CHOPIN IN 1830S PARIS

by

Mark De Zwaan

Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music
Indiana University
May 2018

Accepted by the faculty of the
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music

Doctoral Committee

_____
Karen Shaw, Research Director, Chair

_____
Evelyne Brancart

_____
Arnaldo Cohen

May 4, 2018

To Karen Shaw, my mentor and guiding light for over a decade.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

A portrait is not a picture. A portrait–artist cannot help but imprint an interpretation upon their work, and yet, it is through that interpretation that one perceives the truth of the representation. While a portrait generally begets an accurate depiction, each onlooker is subject to those inherent perceptions of the individual that originally brought the work to life.

This essay is constructed in the spirit of that definition. In the friendship of Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin there is a conundrum: the story is an essential component of the facts. While the details of the timeline can readily be gleaned from a historical document, the dimensionality that existed between these men can only be examined properly from within the drama itself.

The chapters that follow are reconstructions of the events that best narrate the dramatic substance of this friendship. Ten focal points were chosen as the structural canvas upon which to paint the argument. In being a portrait, it carries with it that interpretive influence that all portraits bear. Thus, an opinion about these events and their historical effects is embedded in the arrangement and selection of the information that is presented.

The narrative is divided into three groups. The first four chapters reveal snippets from the youths of these two men that, in each case, measure into the factors that brought them to Paris. The next three chapters center on a particular 1832 premiere, and divulge contributing aspects of each artist's personality. The final three chapters focus upon specific happenings that dismantled their relationship.

The conclusion revolves around the complicated interactions of Liszt, Chopin, and their respective mistresses—Countess Marie d'Agoult, and the eminent writer George Sand. Liszt and d'Agoult began their romance as early as 1833, but it was not until 1835 that Sand would enter the picture, through Liszt's well–known social armada. Through Liszt and d'Agoult, Chopin was finally introduced to the famous writer—a woman that became his greatest romantic ally.

Each chapter is framed as an individual episode, based around a specific event or environment. A selected quotation precedes every section, and provides a point of departure for the discourse that follows. The context of each quotation is made clearer as each chapter draws to a close. As an end–to–end historical portrayal, the sequence is insufficient; instead, it presents a carefully selected collection of the primary events that best facilitate the delivery of the argument and narrative at hand.

After all, it is in stories that we often uncover the most profound truths.

Chapter 1: INTUITIVE OBSTINACY

"…*intuitive obstinacy*—a quality found only in exceptional characters."
Franz Liszt[1]

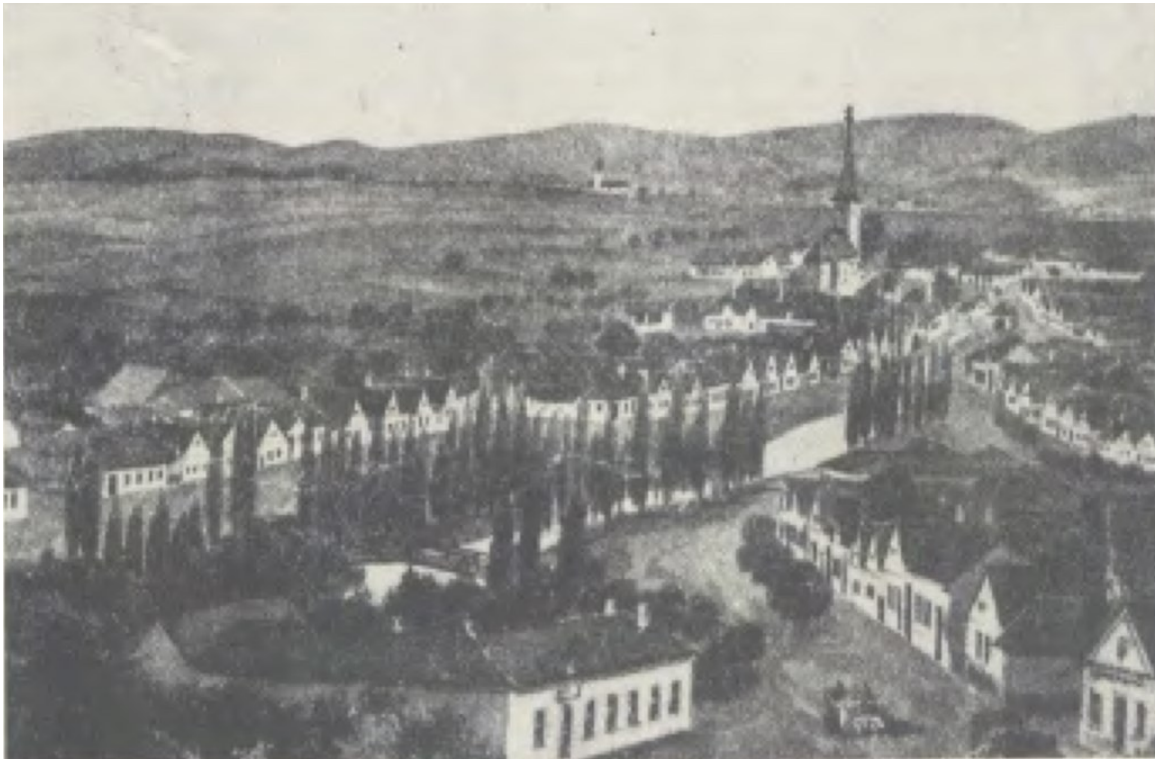

Figure 1.1 The Village of Raiding[2]

It was a total wonder to Adam Liszt that one simple tune could represent such a remarkable twist of fate. It was not the tune itself that enraptured him, as much as it was the person singing it.

Time had not worn well for him in Raiding.[3] He had already spent about eight years there, tending to voluminous flocks, and still each day Adam remembered the shocking and sudden death of his previously realized dream. Before this particular evening—when that tune of the Ries

1. Jacques Vier, *Franz Liszt: L'Artiste, le clerc: Documents inédits* (1950): 111, quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 70.
2. Anonymous painting, ca. 1900, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 10.
3. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years,* 42.

Concerto in C–sharp minor wafted toward him—seldom stirred were any joyful recollections of the life he had left behind.

That former life was born of childhood musical experiences with his father, Georg Adam Liszt—experiences that surely set him on the trail of aspiration.[4] Eventually, George Adam's employment with the Esterházy family afforded Adam the opportunity to join the summer youth orchestra of that prestigious and well–endowed family. This stroke of luck brought him under the direction of Franz Joseph Haydn, from whom he learned music, and perhaps even a few card tricks.[5] Now Adam was firmly pointed toward his dream of becoming a virtuoso, and where better to do so than the sacred place where he had first glimpsed true art—the palace Eisenstadt. It was ideal not only thanks to Haydn's lingering legend, but also thanks to the continuous presence of Prince Nicholas Esterházy, a figure of excellence in the cultivation of art and music. Here was a place where Adam could nurture the passion he loved—if he could even get transferred there at all.

First it was a matter of gaining employment with the family. Unfortunately, the misadventures of his father preceded him in the Esterházy household, though it did not stop Adam from trying.[6] Out of the 25 children George Adam fathered, Adam was one of only three to inherit musical gifts, and Adam was thereby determined to realize the talent he had received. He worked his way into employment with the Esterházys as a servant in an auxiliary locale, and his wish to be transferred was finally granted in 1805.[7] The stuff of his dreams had proven true–to–life, and he was elated by this newly earned ability to devote himself to music in any moment he

---

4. Ibid., 34.
5. Franz Liszt to J. P. von Király, May 1885, in *Letters of Franz Liszt,* trans. Constance Bache, ed. La Mara (London: H. Gravel & Co., 1894), vol. 1, 471–472. One of Franz Liszt's late letters reveals the potential extent of his fathers interactions with Haydn—including more than one hand of cards.
6. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 36–37. Georg Adam Liszt was to thank for evoking suspicion from the Esterházy clan against the Liszt name, which culminated in termination of his employment.
7. Ibid., 41–42.

could spare. For four years, Adam reveled in the delight of this wondrous environment, and altogether it was bliss.

That is why it came as such a heavy blow in 1809, when Prince Nicholas explained his need of Adam in a small village called Raiding—a substantial hub for sheep breeding, if also a remote, and musically vapid, Hungarian peasant village. To say that Adam was engulfed by misery was to put it mildly.

Adam now managed over fifty thousand of the fluffy creatures, and little was his expectation of their musical interactivity. Adam had gone from inspiring encounters with famed musical minds like Johann Nepomuk Hummel and Luigi Cherubini, to the unquantifiable agony of tending these dimwitted, stinky animals in an impoverished region of farmland.[8] For years, despair ruled Adam's heart, until the true blessing of his life arrived in 1811: the birth of a miraculous young boy, whom he decided to name Franz.

In his sixth year, Franz did something miraculous.

Adam was playing the Ries Concerto in C–sharp minor, and Franz was nearby, listening. Adam had constructed a very musical childhood for young Franz, and even here in Raiding the boy was enveloped in evenings of chamber music organized by Adam and his acquaintances.[9] To find Franz nearby was therefore nothing unusual in itself, but on this day, it was entirely different. Franz was listening with an unspoken intensity. As the music drifted up from the piano, the boy seemed to drink in each note. Adam could have easily dismissed the entire incident, were it not for what happened later that night.

In the spontaneous and absent–minded grandeur that only a child can achieve, Franz sang back the Ries melody from memory, after having heard the piece precisely once. The child did not even realize what he was doing. Those without the mind of a 19th century father might overlook the implications of this feat, but Adam knew better. He sensed greatness in his son, and

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 58.

felt that dormant passion rekindling within himself.[10] His lifelong dream—snuffed out the moment he departed the palace Eisenstadt—was finally put into perspective. He could no longer give himself the gift of that dream, but there was one thing he could do.

He could give it to Franz.

It is from this background that the long walk of the real virtuoso began. It was not begun of royalty or some alternate privilege, nor from any well–known family tradition. Instead, it came from a peasant–born sheep–tender who recognized a gift in his son, and whose intuitive obstinacy was the kindling that eventually lit the fire of a legend.

Adam may not have born Franz into a palace like Eisenstadt, but he knew that his boy belonged in the company of those dwelling there. He understood what a cultured environment could do for the boy's education, even if that comprehension stemmed from painful memories of his past. Those tattered remains of his extinguished dream were made new in Franz, but this time, Adam was chasing more than an idle hope.

Now he was chasing Leopold.

---

10. Burger, *Franz Liszt*, 12.

Chapter 2: LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONS

"We use sounds to make music just as we use words to make a language."
Fryderyk Chopin[1]

Figure 2.1 The Warsaw Conservatory and Lyceum[2]

Józef Elsner arrived to Paris in 1805 with his mind on Warsaw. Elsner already had lent his hand to a staggering number of efforts to revitalize the culture of the Polish capital in the early 1800s.[3] This visit was only the next step in that enhancement, further building on the bustling artistic center from which he had traveled. His job was to find a man named Pierre Érard—a name that itself provided a hearty clue about the reason for Elsner's visit.

---

1. Jean–Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42.
2. Lassalle, *The Kazimierz Palace in Warsaw*, 1824, in Ernst Burger, *Frédéric Chopin: Eine Lebenschronik in Bildern und Dokumenten* (München: Hirmer, 1990), 16.
3. Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

Only three years prior to this trip, his focus had been Warsaw's music publishing pursuit, and together with Father Izydor Cybulski, Elsner opened a music engraving shop. By 1818, Elsner's efforts provided further returns in expanding the music school at the Warsaw University. Three years later, there were two divisions devoted to music education thriving within the University, all thanks to Elsner's influence[4].

Sebastian Erard—Pierre's uncle—had already established himself in 1777, gaining traction with his business until he was internationally considered to be the first great piano manufacturer.[5] Érard's shop was therefore an easy selection to make in 1805, if Elsner was looking for an expert. He knew that European trends had already assumed a role in re–forming Warsaw, and Elsner aimed to enable every available avenue that might have an impact on his city's social and musical fingerprint. The ideas that he extracted from Érard would shape the makings of a piano–making business in the Polish capital.

Elsner likely did not know how fortuitous of a companion his goals made to another movement currently sweeping Warsaw. It came from a very different source, but that source still led back to Paris. A man named Stanisław Poniatowski—better known as Stanisław Augustus, the last king of Poland—took an interest in the Parisian social reliance on the institution of the salon, and subsequently imported it to his own capital of Warsaw[6]. He declared Thursdays of every week an occasion for socializing and the sharing of ideas. This gesture brought with it the implicit notion of societal status and casual intellectualism inherited from its Parisian counterpart. Before long, an invitation to one such Thursday event was considered a symbol of status in Warsaw society—the king has chosen wisely.

The strict separation between social classes was relaxed in this environment, which included the middle–class residents and artists in the growing trend. To any Warsaw–based artist, success

---

4. Ibid., 13, 110.
5. Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 22.
6. Goldberg, *Chopin's Warsaw,* 149.

in the salon was now a lucrative method to gain exposure to those patrons of the upper class.[7] The fever for hosting private salons infected the bourgeoisie so thoroughly that middle–class salon gatherings became commonplace. This is where Elsner would have become personally acquainted with this new salon tradition, after his visit with Pierre Érard.

While a man of Elsner's status earned many invitations, one household in particular held a prophetic sort of excitement that would eventually turn irresistible. Mikołaj Chopin was a respected French teacher at the Lyceum, and the gatherings he organized were attracting an erudite crowd of colleagues from the nearby University.[8] It was only a matter of time until Elsner and the Chopins crossed paths. This drew together three critical developments in Warsaw: the beginnings of a new piano manufacturing business, the cultivation of a salon tradition, and the miraculous talent that entered the world with the birth of Fryderyk Chopin.

The fragile infant emerged into a world replete with cultural cognizance, ample encouragement, and thanks to Elsner, a sturdy instrumental tradition from which to draw. Elsner's visit to Érard in 1805 yielded developments in manufacture and craft that made most of the available instruments the handiwork of local workshops.[9] Elsner monitored the boy's growth closely, and when the time was right, he made his most lasting contribution to history—enforcing a musical education that sharpened Chopin into a musical wonder.

Elsner's philosophies on making music were self–described as utilizing sound like a language, or in his words, "language of emotions." His educational ideas were firmly rooted in the Germanic tradition, and thus, topics such as counterpoint and thoroughbass were included as standard fare in his curriculum.[10] He looked upon Mozart—as well as Wolfgang's most–prized

---

7. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.
8. Ibid., 9. The Chopins relocated within immediate proximity of teachers of the University when the Lyceum—for all practical purposes, the high school—was moved into one of the vacant buildings adjacent to the University.
9. Goldberg, *Chopin's Warsaw,* 44.
10. Ibid., 115.

genre: opera—with a profound deference. Additionally, Elsner's wife was the premiere opera diva of Warsaw, and her status surely only strengthened his connections with musical theatre.[11]

These components were surely transmitted to Chopin. The nurturing cloud of support that hovered around him opened a whole world of possibility to him. Ensconced in the atmosphere of the Polish salon, Chopin absorbed the confluence of factors around him with ease. A more ideal environment could not have been constructed for Warsaw's new genius, and still, the most amazing truth came next.

Warsaw was only the beginning.

11. Ibid., 124, 130, 224.

Chapter 3: CHASING LEOPOLD

"You will realize that artistic goal whose spell bewitched my youth in vain."
Adam Liszt[1]

Before he arrived in Boulogne in 1827, it could not have been apparent to Franz Liszt that his father would soon enter the grave.

Adam Liszt reserved a tireless devotion for his only son that had already brought them down a great many paths. His wife, Anna Liszt, was at least as invested as he in Franz, eventually donating the entirety of her dowry to Franz's education, and enduring extended separation from both son and husband in order to allow word of Franz's talent to spread.[2]

Figure 3.1 Adam Liszt[3]

Adam proclaimed and showcased Franz's remarkable talent with relentless fervor. He assumed sole responsibility for all managerial errands, marketing opportunities, and booking requests.[4] The two were inseparable—together, a father and son duo storming Europe, in search of the recognition that the boy sorely deserved. Bystanders began to draw comparisons between this pair and another familiar father–son legend.

---

1. Joseph d'Ortigue, "Franz Liszt: Etude biographique" *Revue et Gazette Musicale*, June 14, 1835, quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 53.
2. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 70. Anna's dowry was to the tune of 1,200 gulden, and according to Walker, "carefully set aside across the years of their marriage."
3. Anonymous gouache, 1819, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 10.
4. Ibid., 97.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart earned a boyhood reputation of magnificent repute, and his father Leopold was the one in charge of the affairs that brought it about. It was an easy jump from there to Franz Liszt and his father. The implicit similarity in the manner by which each father managed their boy–prodigies was impossible to ignore.[5] The comparison wormed its way into Adam's mind so acutely that it became synonymous with his pursuit.

Still aspiring for that great musical dream, he chased the ghost of Leopold Mozart into his own grave, but not before another rumor had lain its hooks into him. At the root of the Liszt–Mozart comparison was a more sinister implication that Adam exploited—rather than encouraged—his boy.[6] Liszt detractors felt that Adam's aims were fame and renumeration in the name of his child's obvious talent. A skewed portrait of the father–son relationship materialized into another menacing specter that stalked Adam at every turn. Its implication was so bold that it bled into other reaches of Adam's history—for example, as Franz's first piano teacher. Adam has been traditionally defamed as inadequate and fraudulent—an altogether unfair and imprecise assessment. Adam Liszt was without a doubt capable of providing elementary instruction to his son.[7] His devotion to the child, coupled with his ample musical background, fit him well to this task.

The greater merit still was his ability to recognize his own limits—something which he had done long before Boulogne. Adam's initial foresight brought him to Vienna in 1819, in search of more appropriate tutelage for his boy.[8] The family relocated there in 1822, and walked directly into the hands of Carl Czerny, respected Vienna pedagogue and famous Beethoven pupil. For ten months young Franz was subjected to rigorous technical training. Czerny emphasized the importance of habits that would last. After these months, Czerny unleashed the young prodigy on the audiences of Vienna, and his success was a guarantee. Little did Adam know that Czerny

---

5. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 129.
6. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 79–80.
7. Ibid., 59.
8. Ibid., 66.

would later become the very one that would turn his comparison to Leopold Mozart on its head. Czerny's resentment cascaded into a residual disease that quickly infected the general public. Czerny was shocked that Adam wished to withdraw from Vienna in order to resume international touring, and in the end, he bolstered claims that Adam was hellbent on milking the talents of his son for profit.[9]

Czerny reasoned that Adam was obsessed with money, and that he recognized Franz as his best avenue—an attitude founded on plausible suspicion, but not in sufficient truth.[10] Adam's primary concern prior to and following their time in Vienna remained the enrichment of his son's talent. In Czerny, Adam had selected a piano teacher that popular history would remember as "the fountainhead of piano–playing"; a man who provided the strict regiment that Franz sorely needed.[11] This was hardly the gesture of an apathetic money–monger. Any money Adam hoped to derive from Franz's talents would almost surely be re–invested in the furthering of his career. While it cannot be said that he gave Franz a normal childhood, Franz was not a normal child. It is difficult to imagine a father with maligned intentions penning these words to Czerny after moving on from Vienna:

> Together with my wife and child I kiss your hands with utmost gratitude for this good work which you have lavished on our boy. Never will you be able to escape our heartfelt thanks.[12]

By December of 1823, Franz Liszt got his first taste of Paris.[13] His success was as predictable as it had been in Vienna, and Adam got right to work organizing new concert dates in England

---

9. Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 163.
10. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 109. Plausible due to Adam's clear financial preoccupation—but stemming from a very different place than Czerny expects, as Alan Walker details: "excessive caution born of a desire never to return to the old days when his family lived from hand to mouth…"
11. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 102.
12. La Mara, ed., *Classisches und Romantisches aus der Tonwelt (*1892) quoted in Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 86.
13. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years,* 192.

and Switzerland. The chase after Leopold gained strength, and the momentum carried the Liszts for years.

Until they arrive in Boulogne 1827, in fact, where a fever put Adam into the hands of strangers, and those strangers laid him to rest.[14] There, the boy Franz Liszt bid farewell to the most profound influence of his early years. He would now honor Adam with a renewed musical quest of his own.[15] Franz would rise to the role, and transform his very name into a mainstay of music history. The people of Paris were in for a treat.

Franz Liszt would be back.

Figure 3.2 The Boy Franz Liszt[16]

14. Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 17.
15. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 40.
16. François de Villain, *Liszt*, 1824, in Burger, *Franz Liszt,* 33.

Chapter 4: NO REVOLUTIONARY

"There is also in Chopin a note of defiance, of insolence almost, towards the *musical* conventions of his time which forms a striking contrast to his exaggerated respect for the strict *social* conventions of the aristocratic circles in which he moved."
Arthur Hedley[1]

"Chopin was, in his own words, 'no revolutionary'…"
Jim Samson[2]

Figure 4.1 Chopin in the Salon[3]

Of the many possible sights available on November 1, 1830, there is a culpable reason why Chopin found himself at Warsaw's National Theatre.

The easy answer is that he was saying goodbye to one of the molds that formed him. He was an almost daily guest to this theater throughout his time in Warsaw, both manifesting the

1. Arthur Hedley, "Chopin: The Man," in *Frédéric Chopin*, ed. Alan Walker (New York: Taplinger, 1967), 4.
2. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 134.
3. Henryk Siemiradski, *Chopin Performs in Count Radiziwill's Salon*, 1887, in Ernst Burger, *Frédéric Chopin: Eine Lebenschronik in Bildern und Dokumenten* (München: Hirmer, 1990), 55.

teachings of his mentor Elsner, and gaining exposure to the very influences that would crystallize into his art.[4]

It was an important choice that particular evening because the next day Chopin would leave Poland and never return.[5] Had he known this departure to be his final farewell, he might even have chosen a different destination that night. To Chopin, leaving Warsaw represented an exciting step beyond everything that he knew, and he was looking forward to it—for the most part. To leave would grieve him in many other ways, but it was a price he was willing to pay in his present temperament.

Chopin was bored. The magnificent world of culture and enterprise into which he was born had grown stale and small to him.[6] Ever since recognizing music as his gift, he completely invested himself in it. His first instructor, Wojciech Żwyny, set a warm example by working so closely with Chopin that he might have been confused for a relative. He was a dear friend to the Chopins, and a daily guest in their household—not only for Fryderyk's piano lessons, but often for dinner as well.[7] Since he was a violinist, he could not have been responsible for assembling Chopin's piano technique, but his daily influence was direct and inspiring to the young boy nonetheless. By 1822, the hungry growth in Chopin's technique had clearly surpassed Żwyny's pedagogical abilities.

Elsner was watching young Chopin since 1817, and it is without doubt that he had another eye on the boy's future possibilities. By 1822, Chopin began composition lessons, and took to them readily. Within four years he built a respectable name for himself as a composer of Warsaw in his own right. Elsner's guidance led Chopin straight to the institution he had been so

---

4. Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227.
5. Samson, *Chopin*, 33.
6. Ibid., 23.
7. Goldberg, *Chopin's Warsaw*, 107.

instrumental in developing.[8] In 1826, at the age of 16, Chopin began his studies at the Warsaw Conservatory, and the magnitude of his education was considerably upgraded.

An explosion of cultural exposure followed for Chopin. He was educated in the French and German languages, physics, history, mathematics, and art—to include visual, literary, and musical disciplines. His teachers were many, but there were several specific figures in music that offered guidance of the utmost quality. His study of thoroughbass and organ began with composer–pianist Václav Würfel, who was eventually replaced with Henry Lentz. Józef Jawurek, a pianist of some repute, also advised Chopin in his studies, all in addition to Elsner's continued presence throughout his evolution.[9]

While it cannot be said that any one of these figures instilled in Chopin the miraculous piano technique he came to possess, the general claim that Chopin's incredible skills were from some inexplainable mastery are made in ignorance of this Warsaw environment. The remarkable collection of instructors at the Conservatory provided inspiring examples from which Chopin could construct his own methods. They challenged his intellect, intensified his sensibility, and enveloped him in music–making alongside his teachers and fellow students. With the perpetual influence of these various factors, Chopin’s artistry was already preparing to speak for itself.

Warsaw salons continued to be popular throughout this period, and by the late 1820s there were plenty of young groups gathering to discuss and extrapolate upon romantic ideals and Polish politics. It was easy for Chopin quickly to earn a place in these circles, given his obvious talent and the inherently original expression of his music.[10] He listened intently as a smattering of ideas swept across the table in front of him. He remained politely aloof as these very people—artists, intelligentsia, bourgeoise—philosophized about politics and revolution. Beneath his reserved

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 111.
10. Ibid., 292.

exterior—despite the practiced and refined presentation of his entire social manner—there remained a truth that he could not escape.

Chopin had definitively conquered the paths of exploration and expansion available to him in Warsaw. Perhaps these are the thoughts that brought Chopin to the National Theare on November 1, 1830, to unknowingly gaze upon it for the last time. He needed more than this city had left to offer him, and despite the fervent love he felt for his homeland, he knew within himself that he was not made for a revolutionary conflict. He was no revolutionary.

It would not have occurred to the Polish prodigy that he was wrong.

He was, too, a revolutionary, though not the type a 19th century socialite expected. Fryderyk Chopin had been meticulously trained in the very things he would need most. With each step forward, this revolutionary contradiction in his spirit was just the fuel that he needed to keep his artistic fire burning.

There was only one city in Europe built to fan a fire like that.

Chapter 5: THE SCOURGE AND THE DARLING

"Of this city Liszt was at once the scourge and the darling."
Willhelm von Lentz[1]

Liszt waited amidst the rest of the concert audience as the appointed hour approached. It was February 26, 1832, and the *Salle Pleyel* had attracted plenty of interested patrons. Though it was not empty, the salon was much emptier than it should have been, considering the artistic statement that was about to be made. To Franz Liszt, this would already make for the second event of the year that would revolutionize his artistic model.

Figure 5.1 The Young Franz Liszt[3]

The first of these events was a complete revelation both to his technique and his artistry — the sight of sensational virtuoso Niccoló Paganini.[2] Liszt had missed the virtuoso's previous visit to Paris in March of 1831, where the master of the violin broadcasted his devilish tricks to a packed Paris Opéra House audience. Liszt made sure to attend Paganini's 1832 demonstration, which sent Liszt careening forward on a path of new discovery with his instrument—one that transformed him into the veritable beast at the piano that comprises his legend.

---

1. Willhelm von Lenz, *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time from Personal Acquaintance: Liszt, Chopin, Tausig, Henselt* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 21.
2. Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 173.
3. Tavernier, *Franz Liszt*, ca. 1834, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 79.

At this second event—this time in the *Salle Pleyel*—Liszt was hardly the only party of note to attend. Felix Mendelssohn was seated in that same audience, which was already an indicator of the event's importance.[4] In addition, the presence of Franz Liszt was a compliment of a different caliber. Everyone in Paris, musician or otherwise, knew the name Franz Liszt.

After his father's death in Boulogne, Liszt was able to ride his boyhood triumphs to prosperity. Then aged 16, he returned to Paris and earned enough money to care for himself and his mother, and in the process of earning his wages, he became one of Paris' most popular piano instructors.[5] Liszt was also building a reputation, and it was entirely based in public spectacle. As far as Paris was concerned, Liszt was larger than life: a fountain of charisma and talent, ready to sound his own praises at the slightest opportunity.[6] This vantage fits neatly with the history that is often assigned to Liszt, but it paints a more accurate picture of the reputation than it does the man. In some ways, it is almost as if Liszt did not have a choice. Eleanor Perenyi adequately broaches the issue: "Consciously or not, [Liszt] was egged on to cultivate the bravura self that came all too easily to him, and to play down the serious composer whose existence it did not suspect."[7]

This approach was at least doing the job of spreading his name across Paris. His social gravity had endless uses, the foremost of which being the achievement of notoriety amidst the resident social circles. Liszt was certainly a known entity to writers, artists, and Romantic heroes living in Paris—he was quite literally acquainted with each one personally.[8] Liszt was liberal in his networking and enterprising in his cultivation of friendships. His elevation of status in Paris—compared to his humble beginnings—was nothing short of astonishing.

---

4. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 83.
5. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 130.
6. Xavier Puslowski, *Franz Liszt, His Circle, and His Elusive Oratorio* (Lanham, MD: Rowman, Littlefield, 2014), 53.
7. Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 46.
8. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years,* 148.

Yet to Liszt, the shortcomings of his background plagued the perception he had of himself.[9] Ever since leaving Raiding with his father, Liszt retained a sore awareness about his lack of formal education. He had been taught to read and write in that small village, but his tours had snatched him away from traditional schooling, and now since age 16 he had been the primary provider for his household. Living in the intellectual epicenter of 1830s Paris, the ache of inadequacy that he felt was as strong as ever.

He developed an insatiable appetite for reading, and then used his connections with the writers of Paris to further sharpen his thinking.[10] He soaked up the language, the culture, and the customs of the city, voicing his ideas in the social circles he frequented. To those that knew him well, Liszt was not a man of affectation. He was a man that nurtured his ever–searching intellect, and his sought to identify with the heroes of the very literature he swallowed whole.[11] He set an intellectual foundation for himself that securely grounded him as a profound thinker and innovative composer that would fully emerge years later, in Weimar.

His resolve was admirable, but the private truth of his inadequate schooling continued to trouble him. Especially given his acquaintance with minds such as Hector Berlioz and Robert Schumann, Liszt could observe first–hand the effects of a tightly–constructed literary understanding unified with profound musical vision. The comparison he derived from their examples drove his artistic spirit for years.

Over time, Liszt's very approach provoked resentment from many of the men with which he shared his ideas. His shining example of talent made him Paris' darling in one moment, and her scourge in the next. There were many who considered his boisterous manner to be an unwelcome side–effect of his artistic presence—in other words, it came with the territory.

---

9. Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 146.
10. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 130.
11. Perényi, *Artist as Romantic Hero*, 48.

In fact, the best such example was the very man waiting nervously backstage at the *Salle Pleyel* on February 26, 1832, as Liszt waited in anticipation.

And he knew a real artist when he saw one.

Chapter 6:THE GREATEST VICE

"You find here the greatest splendour, the greatest filthiness, the greatest virtue and the greatest vice."
Fryderyk Chopin[1]

After Chopin took his last bow that evening of February 26th, 1832, his foremost thank you was owed to a one pianist in particular, and not the one most people expected. Even before Chopin arrived in France, his skill and artistry were well chiseled. Before this journey, Warsaw was all that the 21 year old Pole had ever known.[2] There was no assurance that the glory of his Warsaw days would prove universal in a city as culturally dominating as Paris. The city's cultural and social structure were of a completely separate order from Warsaw, and Chopin knew soon after he arrived that constructing a successful debut would take some social maneuvering.

Then again, Chopin was not exactly at a disadvantage. When he arrived, he was delighted to discover flocks of Polish countrymen and women already settled in the city.[3] He found further comfort in the general Parisian attitude toward Poles—it was in fact "popular" to support the Polish cause, and this made for a welcoming atmosphere all around.[4] This capital was absolutely boiling with culture and artistic life, and it was easy for Chopin to gain his social footing in such a familiar societal structure. He now had a powerful ally in the experience he gained in Warsaw salon movement during his youth. In exile, Chopin had found a home, and he was uniquely suited for it.

He had mechanisms built into his personality that kept him on the right side of decorum at all times. So thick was the dividing line between his public presentation and his more intimate

1. B. E. Sydow, ed., *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* (1955): 187, quoted in Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 80.
2. Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 146.
3. Arthur Hedley, "Chopin: The Man," in *Frédéric Chopin*, ed. Alan Walker (New York: Taplinger, 1967), 10.
4. Samson, *Chopin*, 82.

interactions that he might as well have been encased in glass. This makeup made it easy for him to maneuver between the Parisian social cliques without exposing the extent of his introversion to his devotees. His outward manner involved an air of poise, style, and careful reserve, and this combination was the skeleton key that granted him virtually unlimited access to the Parisian social scene.

Since the February 26th concert at the *Salle Pleyel* was integral to establishing his musical reputation across the city, Chopin sought to make a memorable statement. For an emphatic premiere, he needed an emphatic venue, and for that, he would need to put his social prowess to good use. He struck fortune when he met an astounding pianist shortly after his arrival—a technician that Chopin held in higher esteem than most any other pianist in Paris.[5]

This man was already decidedly famous, and had made short work of the Parisian social circuit in his own way. Once his popularity had exploded, this pianist headlined an era as one of the two greatest pianists in the capital.[6] The influence of this one man would become a deciding factor in the facilitation of Chopin's all–important debut, and it was to him that Chopin's fervent thanks were due as his debut in the *Salle Pleyel* came to a close.

That man was named Friedrich Kalkbrenner.

As a partner in the Pleyel & Sons piano–manufacturing company, he was useful for more than his reputation.[7] He was flattered by Chopin's infatuation with his playing, and even propositioned Chopin to become his teacher, though Chopin politely refused, but established a friendship that was lucrative from the start, as far as Chopin was concerned. His path to the *Salle Pleyel*—and a chance at a successful debut in Paris—was assured.

---

5. William Atwood, *Fryderyk Chopin: Pianist from Warsaw* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 56.
6. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 191.
7. Atwood, *Pianist from Warsaw*, 57.

Word of Chopin's adept musical demonstration spread throughout Paris. What started as whispers about a mysterious Polish talent now progressed to shouts of excited affirmation of his genius. Chopin's calendar was now filled with appointments, and not only of a social nature.

Securing a steady method of income was still a pressing need. In the wake of his performance at the Pleyel salon, an entire enterprise was opened to him. Students flocked from all over Paris, determined to study under this fresh master from Warsaw.[8] His impeccable sense of propriety and his quiet but apparent grasp of style made him not only a desirable teacher, but downright "fashionable."[9]

Figure 6.1 Friedrich Kalkbrenner[10]

With a slew of high–profile students at his doorstep, Chopin could see that the influence of Kalkbrenner's favor had helped a great deal. Yet, while Chopin's pupils were intensely interested in him—and almost always of concrete societal importance—they were decidedly lacking in talent. There are surprisingly few exceptions to this fact[11]—the most notable of them being Karl Filtsch—which shows that his roster was more of a list of assets than a will to his pianistic legacy. To expand that legacy, Chopin would once again need to rely on his own expertise to enter the realm of the central social circles.

Even Kalkbrenner was deputy to certain purveyors of Parisian social culture. Gaining access to a veritable center of the Parisian cultural world would hold greater weight for Chopin than any gesture from Kalkbrenner ever could, and Chopin was already familiar with just the man to get

---

8. Samson, *Chopin*, 85.
9. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists,* 158.
10. *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 1840, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 136.
11. Ibid.

him there. This Hungarian titan of the keyboard had been quick to make Chopin's acquaintance, and even quicker to extol of his virtues.

But to become a friend was not necessarily to become an ally.

Chapter 7: THE SILENT DECEIVER

"He lived inwardly—he was silent and reserved, never said much, and people were often deceived about him, and he never undeceived them."
Franz Liszt[1]

It was only recently when Chopin found that a simple glance across the room could make his gorge rise. He perceived something similar, in fact, from several of the salon's attendees[2]—Berlioz, for one, whom he found increasingly difficult to tolerate, or perhaps Heinrich Heine, who had a way of letting everyone know what he expected out of them, and so the list continued. The person at the very top of that list sat squarely in the middle, directing the chatter like some sort of conductor.

Figure 7.1 Fryderyk Chopin[3]

It was not all terrible for Chopin, however. Participants like cellist August Franchomme or pianist Ferdinand Hiller were certainly welcome sights. Chopin would have been lying to say he never enjoyed himself at these gatherings. His problem was far more dimensional than that.

Everything started out as easy friendship. Even in a city as large as Paris, France, Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin were inevitably drawn to one another.[4] They mutually recognized the

1. Hugh Reginald Haweis, *My Musical Life* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898), 662.
2. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 130. In 1832, the social circle included Hector Berlioz, pianists Ferdinand Hiller and Friedrich Kalkbrenner, string players Pierre Baillot and August Franchomme, and the German poet Heinrich Heine, among others.
3. Art Schaffer, *Frédéric Chopin,* 1847, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 93.
4. Ibid., 131.

enterprising talent in each other, and were poised to learn, in the most ideal environment the 1830s had to offer.

In Chopin, Liszt recognized a revolutionary with a profound sentiment that was fresh and original.[5] Whenever Liszt recognized genius in another artist, he became a facilitator and a reciprocator. Anxious from the opportunity to learn and discover, he made it a habit to throw his entire self into the process of enrichment and support. While Chopin likewise comprehended Liszt's incredible facility, and was helpless but to revere it, one who could be sure of Chopin's favorable opinion could be just as easily certain of an ulterior motive instead.

Figure 7.2 Franz Liszt[7]

Most historical portrayals of the Polish master either glossed over or entirely omitted the uglier side of his persona.[6] His elegance and refined tastes are instead positioned as a backdrop to claims validating his artistic superiority. In the case of Liszt, the comparison is hopelessly uneven. Chopin was indeed born of better stature than Liszt and his father.[8] Elsner all but designed a cultivated developmental environment for Chopin in Warsaw, compared to Liszt's loosely organized reading obsession. The meticulous nature of Chopin's public approach made him socially superior to the Hungarian—if not in fame, certainly in reception.

At the base of Chopin's problem was something more philosophical. Liszt very clearly valued Chopin, and viewed him as precisely the revolutionary he claimed he was not. At first glance, there does not seem to be any palatable reason for a man like Fryderyk Chopin to resent

---

5. Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 66.
6. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 129.
7. Art Schaffer, *Franz Liszt,* 1837, in Burger, *Franz Liszt,* 93.
8. Perényi, *Artist as Romantic Hero,* 62.

Franz Liszt, but Eleanor Perenyi provides another sentiment worth borrowing: "The fact is that [Liszt] did not even see Chopin as Chopin saw himself."[9] For that fact, Chopin never forgave him.

Chopin's true concerns were far removed from those he would have others perceive. Chopin carried more concern for his material appearance than most any other aspect of his life. He doted on his finances and the delivery of his social attitudes, and as such, others interpreted him according to his own careful design.[10] He lived beyond his means so that he might appear to live within the means that were expected of him. He could be cold and aggressive, substituting the raging temper beneath for biting sarcasm on the surface. His friends devoted themselves to him, mystified by his gentle presence and fragile construction. Yet as they bent toward his every whim, feeling certain that they knew how best to advise him, he dictated the terms under which he could be advised.[11] While not maliciously so, it is clear that Chopin was possessive of those close to him; desirous of keeping them within his control.

There was no clear way to control Franz Liszt.

Liszt's formidable social circle was well–established by the end of 1832, and soundly revolved around the Hungarian pianist's fame and example. His involvement with the literary crowd was well–founded by his regular visits to Victor Hugo, the renowned legend and hero to the Romantic generation.[12] He branched out to include other writers like Lamartine and Lamennais in his meetings and discussions. There was no denying that Franz Liszt was incredibly connected, in a way that Chopin was not.

---

9. Ibid., 63.
10. Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.
11. Arthur Hedley, "Chopin: The Man," in *Frédéric Chopin*, ed. Alan Walker (New York: Taplinger, 1967), 7.
12. Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 151.

No matter how superior Chopin was in birth, stature, or otherwise, there was no escape from the fact that he needed Liszt for his crowd. Liszt might have recognized and admired the genius within Fryderyk Chopin from the start, but strictly speaking, he did not at all *need* Chopin, because Liszt had been Liszt before Chopin ever even gazed upon Paris.

There were also additional, more explicit, factors at play. For a group that prided itself in its intellectualism, Chopin did not have much to offer for discussion. The masterful intellect that surely resided within him was not put on regular display; it was reserved for his own internal designs—foremost of which, his compositions—or his own class of intimate friends.[13] In the Liszt circle, he refrained from committing himself, and was thus principally valued for his imminent talent—and little else.

From this vantage, the origin of Chopin's resentment becomes clearer. Coupled with the antics Liszt employed at the piano, any admiration that Chopin felt toward him was doomed from the start.[14] To Chopin, Liszt was flying his flag in the face of his primary vehicle for artistic expression. The "parlor tricks" at Liszt's disposal were abominable and hypocritical coming from he who held such a high court on artistic values and musical ideals. Chopin could not help but see in Liszt an effect–driven charlatan, lacking the real substance of vision, and in time, Chopin silently turned on him.[15]

That Chopin was repulsed by Liszt's manner was not a shocking—or for that matter, particularly unpopular—point of view. Alan Walker cites several examples of friends who eventually "either abandoned him or turned against him," on a list which includes Berlioz, Mendelssohn, and Chopin himself.[16] Liszt's presence was always loud, and not always welcome.

---

13. Samson, *Chopin,* 85.
14. Xavier Puslowski, *Franz Liszt, His Circle, and His Elusive Oratorio* (Lanham, MD: Rowman, Littlefield, 2014), 53.
15. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 184.
16. Ibid., 189.

The crucial point is that Liszt's overblown personality—however lewd—was no direct gesture against Chopin. It was a way of life sown and sprouted from the age of 16, with zero intention of treading upon Chopin's artistic vision. Chopin took Liszt's behavior as an offense to his artistic sensibilities, and made it personal.[17]

What is perhaps most telling about Chopin is how he maintained the pretense of friendship with Liszt in order to further benefit himself. Chopin's disapproval was, for the most part, unbeknownst to Liszt. The signals were clearly visible, but Liszt harbored little suspicion for an intimate who he considered to be his closest friend. The game of Fryderyk Chopin was not obvious action. His calculation was too closely guided by restraint for anything so direct as that.

There was little use in undeceiving those who would deceive themselves.

17. Puslowski, *Franz Liszt,* 53.

Chapter 8: SUPERSTITIONS OF THE HEART

> ”Inclined as I was to superstitions of the heart, in a kind of mystical delirium I sometimes felt that I had been summoned by God, somehow offered to the greatness and the salvation of this heavenly genius who had nothing in common with other men and was above the common law!”
> *Marie d’Agoult*[1]

It does not take a stretch of the imagination to see why Chopin was livid. His attitude toward Liszt had already soured before his supposed sojourn from Paris, and now to return and find that Liszt had taken advantage of him was not going to help matters.

For Liszt, on the other hand, this all could be chalked up to yet another defeat at the hands of those "temptations of the road."[2] Liszt's reputation was not limited to his blistering virtuosity and his waxing philosophical in his own affluent circle. He had also earned a reputable weakness for women. This perception was perpetuated by the spectacle of his personality, which inspired a devotion in his followers that Heinrich Heine—a short–lived fan of Liszt, if he ever was one at all—would eventually term "Lisztomania."[3]

No matter how severe his weakness, the rumor of it crystallized into a solid feature of the Liszt legend, and now it would have given Chopin all the more reason to bristle at finding out about what Liszt had done. Amidst the already constant gossip regarding a very separate Liszt relationship, to Chopin, this was an unfathomable act of errant impropriety.

Chopin was well acquainted with that separate Liszt relationship, which had begun in January of 1833. Liszt was struck by one of fate's unpredictable and irresistible conspiracies in the salon

---

1. Adrian Williams and Franz Liszt, *Portrait of Liszt: By Himself and His Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 71.
2. Xavier Puslowski, *Franz Liszt, His Circle, and His Elusive Oratorio* (Lanham, MD: Rowman, Littlefield, 2014), 87.
3. Ibid.

of Marquise Le Vayer.[4] There he caught the eyes of Countess Marie d'Agoult, and the rest took care of itself. Marie was a descendant of a well–to–do banking family from Germany, and harbored passionate ambitions to become a respected 19th century writer.[5] It was not long before her romance with Liszt was common knowledge to most anyone, despite the fact that she remained married to Count Charles d'Agoult throughout their affair.

Chopin had so far made special effort to avoid Madame d'Agoult where possible. The most blatant evidence stems from a standing dinner invitation that the Countess d'Agoult extended to Chopin.[6] For reasons of her own, d'Agoult was curious to meet the Polish master, had written to him on two occasions— both of which he ignored. Marie was insulted, and subsequently protested to Liszt, whose displeasure is exhibited in his own sarcasm:

> Unless there is an official and precise order signed by the (my) Countess d'Agoult, an order which I shall voluntarily execute with the help of the royal gendarmerie, do not count at all on the visit of the famous pianist F. Chopin. . .[7]

Chopin might not have been exactly respectful toward Liszt's mistress, but learning of what Liszt had done in his apartment would be a difficult transgression for him to overlook. Chopin was righteously angry, however, and not just because he had found out about Liszt and Marie on the floor of his own apartment. He had granted Liszt its use in the first place, after all, but there was a larger problem.

Liszt was on the floor with the wrong Marie.

The supposed Marie in question was in fact Marie Pleyel—formerly Marie Moke, possessed of a hard–earned piano–virtuoso reputation of her own. She had studied with Moscheles, as well

---

4. Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 190.
5. Ibid., 192.
6. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 132.
7. Fryderyk Chopin, *Correspondance de Frédéric Chopin* (1981): vol. 2, 95–96, quoted in Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries,* 133.

as Herz and Kalkbrenner, and earned the admiration of many prominent musicians of the era.[8] Chopin dedicated the *Nocturnes* of Op. 9 to her in 1833, and accolades were liberally showered upon her by Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and of course, Franz Liszt.

In her school days, she had accumulated quite the roster of romantic intrigue.[9] First was Ferdinand Hiller, a pianist well–acquainted with Chopin and Liszt by the time they coexisted together in Paris. The romance that blossomed between Hiller and Ms. Moke was further complicated by Berlioz—a friend to Hiller, who had agreed to act as a go–between in delivering the couple's amorous messages.

The vehemence of Hiller's feelings peaked Berlioz's curiosity, and it wasn't long before he himself was wrapped up in her trance. The effect was so magnetic, in fact, that Berlioz did not rest until he had secured an engagement with Marie. Unfortunately for Berlioz, a necessary trip pulled him away from Paris, and in the meantime a successful gentleman by the name of Camille Pleyel swooped in and married Marie right out from under him. Marie Moke became Marie Pleyel, of the same Pleyel family whose salon had hosted Chopin's 1832 debut performance.

Figure 8.1 Marie Pleyel[10]

From this point of view, one can better understand Chopin's discontent. His friend, Camille Pleyel, represented an important professional contact—not to mention a comfortable long–time acquaintance[11]—and Liszt's irresponsibility was now threatening to that business relationship, at

8. Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 204.
9. Puslowski, *Franz Liszt*, 56.
10. Adolph, *Marie Moke–Pleyel,* ca. 1835, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 117.
11. Ibid., 57.

least in Chopin's mind. In many ways, this was the first crack in the lining of the Liszt–Chopin friendship. Chopin distanced himself from Liszt and his circle, and the frequent interaction of the two pianists was scaled back.

It must be noted that a circumstance like this makes certainty or absolute evidence impossible. Alan Walker puts it best: "While the story is basically unprovable, certain pieces of circumstantial evidence do support it."[12]

Though it is plausible that this would have complicated things between Liszt and the *right* Marie, it seems not to be the case. It only expanded the fame of her affair with Liszt, perhaps most of all because it did not break them. The sting of the incident was softened thanks to happenstance. The couple soon escaped Paris to begin their famous Years of Pilgrimage, and Liszt's presence in Paris became intermittent. Chopin had a chance to cool down, but it did not halt his worry about what Liszt's continued company might bring.

Chopin should have worried about Marie d'Agoult.

D'Agoult's desire to be revered was not to be underestimated, and she was not the type to forget an insult. Chopin's dismissal of her would fester into a resentment that was further revealed with each of Chopin's professional successes.[13] The sort of acknowledgement d'Agoult sought from Chopin was virtually sidestepped thanks to the arrival of a new presence in Chopin's life. This woman's name carried a resounding implication not only for Marie d'Agoult, but for the continued friendship of Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin.

It was the name that would bring about its end.

---

12. Walker. *The Virtuoso Years,* 185.
13. William Atwood, *Fryderyk Chopin: Pianist from Warsaw* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 129–130.

Chapter 9: A REAL VIRTUOSO

"...a real virtuoso with a well–deserved reputation does not know the meaning of jealousy."
Fryderyk Chopin[1]

Figure 9.1 Caricature of Liszt[2]

Anything strong enough to wrench Liszt away from his travels with his mistress was a strong force indeed. Yet, even as Liszt endured the grueling 3–day trip back to Paris, it was clear that he had something quite unsettling on his mind.

Instead, it had to do with the latest Parisian pianist–sensation, Sigismond Thalberg. It all started back in March 13, 1836, when *La Ménestrel* had trumpeted this newcomer's arrival:

---

1. Fryderyk Chopin to Joseph Elsner, December 14, 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin,* ed. And trans. Arthur Hedley (New York: Da Capo Press, 1963), 103.
2. Lemercier, *Franz Liszt*, 1836, in Ernst Burger, *Frédéric Chopin: Eine Lebenschronik in Bildern und Dokumenten* (München: Hirmer, 1990)*,* 151.

> Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Chopin, Liszt, and Herz are and will always be for me great artists, but Thalberg is the creator of a new art which I do not know how to compare to anything that existed before him. . . . Thalberg is not only the premiere pianist of the world, he is also an extremely distinguished composer.[3]

Once Liszt caught wind of that, he obsessed over it. He raced to put on two concerts at the *Salle Erard,* and—though the captivated, sold–out audiences spoke clearly enough[4]—Liszt would not let it go. In January of 1837, he published a "review" of Thalberg's Opp. 15 and 19 compositions, and then set an astonish pace for competition, appearing on the performer's platform at least fifteen times.[5]

His Thalberg article was more of a slaughter than a review. Liszt belittled the Austrian–born pianist beyond mere critique, well into the realm of personal insult. It was difficult for the public to read Liszt's gesture as anything but envy, and that had the sorry side–effect of blowing the whole thing even further out of proportion. Despite Liszt's worrisome preoccupation with it all, far more tragic were the things that it made him miss.

Two fatal assumptions would return to haunt him by the end of the following year. The first was a simple miscalculation. Chopin had previously passed judgment on Thalberg, stating plainly that "he is not my man."[6] Liszt's assumption was to interpret Chopin's response as a form of indirect support for his own cause. In a letter to Marie d'Agoult about the Thalberg situation, Liszt declared: "Chopin, whom I saw this very morning, loves me tenderly and exclusively."[7] Another note scrawled to Chopin from Liszt's mother, Anna, confirmed the confidence that Liszt

---

3. Franz Liszt, *An Artist's Journey: Lettres d'un bachelier és musique, 1835–1841,* ed. and trans. Charles Suttoni (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 23.
4. Ibid., 24.
5. Ibid.
6. Fryderyk Chopin to Jan Matusyński, December 25, 1830, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin,* 76.
7. Franz Liszt to Countess d'Agoult, May 14, 1836, in ibid., 135.

felt about Chopin's friendship, with a direct reference to Chopin as one of Liszt's "best friends, of which you are the first."[8]

Chopin's judgment of Thalberg was not intended as a sort of inverse compliment to Liszt. In fact, Chopin recognized Liszt's feelings for Thalberg to be eerie mimicry of his own feelings about Liszt. Chopin was bothered by Liszt's Thalberg review for his careless treatment of a fellow artist.[9] Even more potent was the inherent hippocracy Chopin saw in any claim like that coming from Franz Liszt.

Though that first assumption was indeed unfortunate for Liszt, the second was far more deadly with the passage of time. It had to do with a woman named Aurore Dupin—better recognized by her pen–name: George Sand. Sand—being of noble, though illegitimate, birth—had built her renown steadily in Paris, using her sharp wit and fetching looks to considerable effect, and blazing a trail on a level rivaled only by figures like Chopin and Liszt.[10] She was known as a writer and a respectable correspondent to many 19th century minds, and her colorful persona was further enhanced by her unconventional social manner and presentation. There was no doubt that she was attractive, but in the perception of 19th century Paris, she was also decidedly "male"—both her stout independence, and her consistent preference for dressing more in the style of a

Figure 9.2 Sigismond Thalberg[11]

8. Anna Liszt to Fryderyk Chopin, May 12, 1836, in ibid.
9. Pierre Azoury, *Chopin through His Contemporaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 139.
10. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 187.
11. Josef Kriehuber, *Sigismond Thalberg,* 1838, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 90.

man.[12]

Her attention had recently settled on Casimir Dudevant, and though he had married her—elevating her to the title of Baroness—for him to retain her attention was a more difficult proposition. The list of Sand's previous conquests was long enough to suggest how easily that attention could shift, given an appropriate stimulus. In fact, it was not long before Dudevant was replaced by Alfred de Musset.

By 1835, Sand recognized a fresh stimulus in Franz Liszt.

Her attraction to the Liszt circle was entirely predictable, considering her substantial reputation. Liszt was well–acquainted with her writing, evidenced by a letter where he implies intimate familiarity with a startling amount of her works.[13] It is no coincidence that when she began attending Liszt's gatherings, her reputation was recognized and acknowledged immediately.

Sand and Liszt were blatantly taken with one another right away. Liszt was fully entranced by her wit and manner, and Sand fully reciprocated his intense creative companionship. What started as common social meetings progressed into more intimate sessions, until late–evening visits were regular, and the gossip around Paris was in full force.[14] The assumption could only be that Liszt and Sand were in love, and Sand's *Lettre d'un voyageur sur Lavater* from September of 1835 certainly seemed to offer support toward that idea—foremost from in the endearing nickname she uses for Liszt:

> It is you above all, my dear Frantz, whom I place in a picture flooded with light, a magic vision surging through the dark shadows of my contemplative evenings. In the

12. Ibid., 139.
13. Liszt, *An Artist's Journey*, 205. Editor Charles Suttoni mentions a letter to Valérie Boissier where there is an implication that Liszt was familiar with several of Sand's works: *Lélia, Leone Leoni, Valentine,* and the acclaimed *Indiana*.
14. Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 111.

> candlelight, through a halo of admiration that crowns and envelops you. . . . I love to see your affectionate gaze. . .[15]

There is sound evidence that their interactions remained plutonic, however, seen most blatantly in the very nature of their communications during this period. Liszt's response to Sand's above letter, as well as two subsequent correspondences, were published in the *Gazette Musicale,* and were even later compiled into Liszt's collection of essays *Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique.*

This sort of resoundingly public correspondence was infinitely more commonplace in the mid–1830s than can be imagined in present–day.[16] Liszt is famously thought to have composed his responses with generous assistance from his mistress, Marie d'Agoult, who harbored passionate writing ambitions of her own. That means this first response to Madame Sand, and the ones that followed, for that matter, were monitored, edited, and perhaps even composed by Madame d'Agoult—a discouraging configuration for a budding romance between Sand and Liszt. The interplay between these three individuals was hardly a critical factor when the letter surfaced in the *Gazette Musicale* on November 23, 1835. It would not fully come together until 1836, when Liszt could see only Sigismond Thalberg.

The Thalberg affair persisted into the following year, until the legendary duel hosted by the Princess Belgiojoso in the spring of 1837.[17] Liszt resumed and abandoned his travels as permissible throughout this period, and thus, the path to his own woe was paved. First, George Sand visited Liszt and d'Agoult in the countryside, and reciprocated their hospitality with a standing invitation to her manor home in Nohant.[18] That was when Liszt made the most fatal assumption of the Chopin–Liszt friendship.

He assumed that they would get along.

---

15. Liszt, *An Artist's Journey*, 213–214.
16. Ibid., xiii.
17. Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 239.
18. Samson, *Chopin,* 140; Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 231.

Chapter 10: TO BREAK BEFORE BROKEN

"How fortunate, then, is he who knows enough to break with things before he is broken by them!"
Franz Liszt[1]

Figure 10.1 Marie d'Agoult[2]

Liszt waited amidst the rest of the concert audience as the appointed hour approached. It was April 26, 1841, and the *Salle Pleyel* had attracted plenty of interested patrons. It was only just over 9 years earlier that Liszt sat in a remarkably similar position, waiting, in fact, on the very same performer, in this very same salon.

This time Marie d'Agoult would have the last word. As far as d'Agoult was concerned, this concert was just what she needed to exact revenge on Madame George Sand. The time she had spent together with Sand at her manor home in Nohant had bent their relationship until it were irreparably broken. Though d'Agoult could not point her retaliation directly at Sand, the legendary writer would get the message via her lover—the performer of this evening's concert—on which D'Agoult's own famous lover was planning to write a review.[3]

D'Agoult had already stuck her pen in the ink of several publications that went out under Liszt's name. The most notable examples of these collaborative efforts were the *Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique*, which now—with their blatant depictions of intimacy and respect toward

1. Franz Liszt, *An Artist's Journey: Lettres d'un bachelier és musique, 1835–1841,* ed. and trans. Charles Suttoni (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 28.
2. Henri Lehman, *Comtessa Marie d'Agoult,* 1839, in Ernst Burger, *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),* 93.
3. Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195.

Sand—seemed quite ironic.[4] In that collaboration they had glorified Sand's reputation—along with Liszt's—but now that same collaboration would be Sand's repayment for her insolence.

It was simply a matter of waiting until May 2, when the piece would print.

It is less clear whether Liszt was complicit to Marie's motive, or at all aware of any vitriol that existed between the lines the published review. It is possible that he delighted in stirring up further publicity for himself in the process, but at the heart of the matter, the most likely case is that Liszt's thoughts on Chopin's artistry were indeed heartfelt.

Figure 10.2 George Sand[5]

The drama between these formerly aligned parties was in fact inspired in the first place by a recent work by Honoré de Balzac entitled *Béatrix.* The work was released shortly after Liszt and d'Agoult's holiday at Nohant—a period where Sand regularly observed their interactions, and when Balzac saw fit to pay the group a visit.[6] Balzac's resulting creation conjured up a deranged characterization of the Liszt–d'Agoult relationship, dripping with embarrassing detail. To the public at large, the comparison with Liszt and d'Agoult was irresistible. Liszt outright denied there being any likeness of himself in Balzac's work.[7] D'Agoult felt she knew a deeper truth.

---

4. Liszt, *An Artist's Journey*, 3–38. The first three of these essays parallel George Sand's *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, and were Liszt's portion of his continued correspondence with Sand in 1835, published for general public consumption.
5. Charpentier, *George Sand*, 1837, in Burger, *Franz Liszt,* 93.
6. Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 378.
7. Ibid.

She learned this truth during her lengthy stay at Nohant. She had originally arrived with Liszt on February 5, 1837, but it was not long before he was bolting back to Paris after Thalberg.[8] It was no help that d'Agoult was already neurotic by nature, obstinate in her need to control Liszt both publicly and privately, and jealous in her regard for Sand's considerable literary fame.[9] The contributing factors were numerous—the inevitable suggestion of a relationship between Liszt and Sand, the longstanding tension between Chopin and d'Agoult, and even d'Agoult's inferior standing in the company of these three nineteenth–century giants—but the sharpest cut was in fact instigated by an external source.

Charlotte Marliani became entangled with the two women when d'Agoult wrote her a letter describing Sand and Chopin's romance as "a comedy."[10] While Liszt was busy obsessing over Sigismond Thalberg, Marliani put these jealous women against each other by passing on d'Agoults private opinions to Sand. In fact, it was Marliani's "great pleasure" to share the private correspondence of one woman with the other.[11] When Sand heard d'Agoult's true sentiment, it set her on the warpath. Her novel, *Horace*, released in 1841, presented a character once again meant to represent d'Agoult. Sand herself described the character as such: "she had, indeed, a nobility as artificial as everything else, her teeth, her bosom, her heart."[12]

It follows that the furious and despairing tears wept by Marie when she derived the source of it all were not only a response to fresh injustices, but to years of accumulating them. Perhaps worst of all about these caricatures was that their humiliating representation did not disqualify their truth. Balzac illustrated a self–destruction of their relationship that was true to life, and Sand's treatment of d'Agoult was faithful to her perceptions of the Countess during her visit at

---

8. Liszt, *An Artist's Journey*, 25.
9. Eleanor Perényi, *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 170.
10. Walker, The Virtuoso Years, 378, note 38.
11. Edward N. Waters, "Chopin by Liszt," *The Musical Quarterly 47*, no. 2 (Apr 1961): 174–175, accessed September 11, 2017, http://jstor.org/stable/740730.
12. Ibid.

Nohant. Liszt refused d'Agoult's demands for retribution, more deft at controlling himself in the face of such dreadful publicity than his tempestuous misstress.[13]

It seemed Marie d'Agoult had but one option left.

It is at this point that the historical perspectives divide in their regard for the motives of what happened next. Older accounts, such as that of William Atwood, put forth the idea that Liszt's restraint was only a temporary measure. Liszt, by this perspective, was simply presenting a "friendly facade," until his chance arrived, and as a result, subsequent readings were tinged with this bias, decrying the backhandedness of the supposed compliments Liszt presented in the review.[14] Recent scholars like Alan Walker and Jim Samson have chosen a different tack, however, generally removing this malicious dimension from the issue by way of a simpler attitude: Liszt, while always Liszt, had immense respect for his friend, and shared those words in kindness.[15]

In any case, Chopin's annoyance at Liszt's chosen tone—coupled with the boiling tension between their women, to which Chopin was a helpless victim[16]—was soon glued to his continued dissatisfactions with Liszt. Perhaps Chopin detected some of the sarcasm that Atwood's historical perspective implies, but it is more likely that this last flare of resentment comes from something simpler. The April 26 concert was another astounding success for Chopin, but he was not quite responsible for the inspiration behind that triumph, either—he was again indebted to the actions of a single man, and that man was Franz Liszt.

---

13. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 378, note 38.
14. William Atwood, *Fryderyk Chopin: Pianist from Warsaw* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 130. Atwood holds up Liszt's words to Marie: "The best thing in this sort of situation is to smile until one can plunge the knife in deeply."
15. Samson, *Chopin*, 195; Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 356. In conversation with Atwood's portrayal, Walker offers a different look at Liszt's words, in response to Marie:"Is your name in it? Did you find your address in it, or the number of your house? No! Well then, what are you crying about?" Janka Wohl, *François Liszt: Recollections of a Compatriot,* trans. B. Peyton Ward (London: Ward & Downey), 68, Internet Archive.
16. Waters, "Chopin By Liszt", 175.

Liszt, throughout all of the drama of his life, managed to blaze new trails with shocking regularity. Just prior to Chopin's "reemergence" in public performance, Liszt debuted his latest invention in London, and its example would continue to resound in Paris and beyond.[17] Perfectly in line with his demonstrations of virtuoso spectacle, Liszt had created the solo piano recital, and even Atwood dared admit of its thundering success. Were it not for this development, Chopin might never have been stirred enough into action to overcome his disdain for performance again before the crowds of Paris.

That is why in a review of heartfelt congratulations from Franz Liszt, the only thing Chopin could see was condescension.

In this, the last of the friendship between Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin was dissolved. Correspondence between Chopin and his father show the continued disappointment that loomed as Chopin retreated into a domestic life with George Sand.[18] Liszt's path was quite the opposite, leading away from his failed love with Marie d'Agoult, and into a period of unparalleled success as a solo performer. While the confluence of their personas heretofore lived on in the spirit of Romanticism, their persons unknowingly bid farewell.

"I left Paris soon after," said Liszt, "and never saw him again."[19]

---

17. Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 356.
18. Nicholas Chopin to Fryderyk Chopin, March 21, 1842, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin,* ed. and trans. Arthur Hedley (New York: Da Capo Press, 1963), 218. Mikołaj Chopin wrote the following to Chopin on March 21, 1842: "I confess I didn't expect to hear what you tell me about [Liszt], and the reference to him and Thalberg in the article about your concert will not help much to bring you together again. In such circumstances, what are you to do?"
19. Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician* (London: Novello, 1888), 171, Internet Archive.

Bibliography

Atwood, William. *Fryderyk Chopin: Pianist from Warsaw.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Azoury, Pierre. "Fellow Pianist and Composer: Franz Liszt," in *Chopin through His Contemporaries,* 127–149. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Bauer, Marion. "The Literary Liszt." *The Musical Quarterly 22,* no. 3 (Jul 1936): 295–313. Accessed September 11, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/738873.

Burger, Ernst. *Franz Liszt: A Chronicle of His Life in Pictures and Documents.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Burger, Ernst. *Frédéric Chopin: Eine Lebenschronik in Bildern und Dokumenten.* München: Hirmer, 1990.

Chopin, Fryderyk. *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin.* Edited and translated by Arthur Hedley. New York: Da Capo Press, 1963.

Eigeldinger, Jean–Jacques, and Roy Howat. *Chopin, Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Gibbs, Christopher Howard, and Dana A Gooley. *Franz Liszt and His World.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Goldberg, Halina, ed. *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Goldberg, Halina. *Music in Chopin's Warsaw.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Haweis, Hugh Reginald. *My Musical Life.* London: Longmans, Green, 1898.

Lenz, Willhelm von. *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time from Personal Acquaintance: Liszt, Chopin, Tausig, Henselt.* New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.

Liszt, Franz. *An Artist's Journey: Lettres d'un bachelier és musique, 1835–1841.* Edited and translated by Charles Suttoni. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Liszt, Franz. *Letters of Franz Liszt.*Translated by Constance Bache. Edited by La Mara. London: H. Gravel, 1894.

Liszt, Franz. *Life of Chopin.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005.

Niecks, Frederick. *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician.* London: Novello, 1888. Internet Archive.

Perényi, Eleanor. *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1974.

Puslowski, Xavier. *Franz Liszt, His Circle, and His Elusive Oratorio.* Lanham, MD: Rowman, Littlefield, 2014.

Rosen, Charles. *The Romantic Generation.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Sala, Luca, ed. *"Grandeur et Finesse": Chopin, Liszt, and the Parisian Music Scene.* Specvlvm Mvsicae, edited by Roberto Illiano, vol. 20. Brepols: Turnhout, BE, 2013.

Samson, Jim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Samson, Jim. *Chopin.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Schonberg, Harold. *The Great Pianists.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt. Vol. 1, The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Walker, Alan, ed. *Frédéric Chopin.* New York: Taplinger, 1967.

Waters, Edward N. "Chopin by Liszt." *The Musical Quarterly 47*, no. 2 (Apr 1961): 170–194. Accessed September 11, 2017. http://www.jstor.org/stable/740730.

Williams, Adrian, and Franz Liszt. Portrait of Liszt: By Himself and His Contemporaries. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

Wohl, Janka. *François Liszt: Recollections of a Compatriot.* Translated by B. Peyton Ward. London: Ward & Downey, 1887. Internet Archive.

Zebrowski, Dariusz, ed. *Studies in Chopin.* Warsaw: Chopin Society, 1973.